

Adequate Characteristic of Higher Education in India

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ABSTRACT

The problems of the Indian education system relate to access, equity, number, relevance, quality and resource crunch. There is a tremendous churning taking place in higher education the world over. Nations are struggling to cope with the diametrically opposite demands of quality education and a phenomenal increase in the number of students wanting to pursue higher education. India being a developing country is no exception. In fact she has a much tall order as both the quality and quantity of higher education requires better academic and physical infrastructure in spite of resource crunch, while many other equally important sectors also deserve adequate resource allocations. Besides this, there is a whole spectrum of issues having direct or indirect bearing on the efforts for attaining excellence in higher education; only a few selected crucial issues have been taken up in the present paper for the purpose of discussion.

KEYWORDS: Adequate, Higher Education, Characteristics

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The Quality Consciousness

The growing concern for quality culture in higher education institutions in the country assumed added significance with the setting-up of the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC). The concern has triggered academic initiatives for quality evaluation, quality sustenance and quality up gradation. Making NAAC accreditation mandatory by UGC for the colleges is a welcome step. However, bound to put tremendous pressure on the NAAC's resources as institutions have been accredited by it against the university institutions and eligible colleges in the country. The University Grants Commission, a statutory organization established by an Act of Parliament for the purpose of coordination, determination and maintenance of standards of university education has implemented a number of schemes for promotion of quality in higher education even prior to the emergence of NAAC on the scene.

Various Dimensions of Higher Education

Quality of teaching, research and extension-the three dimensions of higher education have invariably been in sharp focus due to various policy interventions and programmes initiated over the years by the concerned statutory/regulating bodies such as the University Grants Commission (UGC), All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE), Medical Council of India (MCI), Pharmacy Council of India (PCI), Council of Architecture (CoA), Bar Council of India (BCI), National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE), Dental Council of India (DCI), Indian Nursing Council (INC) etc. It is expected that while the collegiate sector will excel in teaching by adopting various teaching/learning pedagogies, the Universities will primarily function as quality research hubs, both for basic and applied research, being equipped with the highly qualified inter-disciplinary/trans-

disciplinary faculty and latest/advanced technology/equipment etc. Universities are expected to groom their intake into excellent human resource reservoir on which any nation may feel proud of. While it is expected that teaching and research be complementary and supplementary to each other, the third dimension, namely extension, should be more visible and serve as a vital link between the institution and the society.

By and large, unfortunately this is not happening in a fairly good number of institutions in the country due to various reasons. On one hand, while the mushroom growth of higher education institutions, and some of them even without necessary infrastructural facilities being non-viable due to poor enrolment has posed one more challenge to the policy planners and educational administrators; on the other hand, our premier institutions like IITS and IIMS are performing exceptionally well and have now established their edge over their contemporaries in the knowledge based world economy.

Essential Factors

Academics, finance and management/governance are the essential factors in the field of higher education. It is evident that sincere efforts have been at various levels to upgrade the academic standards through observance of academic calendar and minimum standards of instructions, periodic curriculum revision, examination reforms etc.; financial crunch on the part of the State has often been considered as one of the crucial impediments for promotion of excellence in higher education. However, this varies from State to State. In this context the feasibility of granting the status of central university to all the universities of the country and pooling of both the Central and states' higher education sector

allocations for the purpose of disbursing development and maintenance grants by the centre to these universities may be explored and experimented with. This will at least ensure fair and equitable distribution of nation's resources for development of higher education irrespective of the financial health of a particular state.

One may not deny the fact that the cost of imparting higher education has registered manifold increase over the years due to hike in general price index while the fee structure remained more or less stagnant over the decades, thus causing swelling burden on the State's resources. Institutions, therefore, have to generate their own resources to meet their running cost. But even in such a situation, the fact of the matter is that even the available financial support from the state to higher education is not being fully and properly utilized in time by some of the grantee institutions due to obvious reasons. This needs to be constantly monitored. The proposal of linking of one-third of the UGC developmental assistance with performance/ accreditation of the colleges is expected to revitalize the collegiate sector.

National Education Commission

With the objective to give more focused attention to the proper and coordinated development of higher education in each specialized field like technical, medical, nursing, teacher education etc., the Government of India has established statutory bodies over the years. However, a close scrutiny of the mandate, objectives and functioning of such statutory bodies reveals that there is some sort of overlapping in their functioning resulting into confusion even in the minds of the higher education institutions. These calls for creation of an apex body for higher education, 'National Education Commission', as envisaged in the National Policy on Education and the Programme of Action to draw integrated policy, curricula and syllabi and also coordinate the activities falling under the rubric of educational system. This may also reduce/rationalize the visits of multiplicity of such bodies/agencies to the universities for various purposes.

State Council of Higher Education

Effectiveness of the various quality improvement programmes/measures initiated by UGC and other concerned statutory/regulating bodies in the field of higher education largely depends on the efficacy of the delivery system wherein stakeholders have a crucial role to play. 'Education' being on the Concurrent List of the Constitution is a baby to be nourished by all concerned. Lack of coordination and effective liaising among the stakeholders often results in under resources and overlapping State level by creating 'State Council of Higher Education' under the leadership of the Chancellor may enhance effectiveness of management of higher education and facilitate resolution of many conflicting and pending issues of the state universities. With a view to give focused attention to such crucial matters, the Chancellor's office may create a separate secretariat through a policy decision at the appropriate level.

All India Higher Education Service

'Educational administration' is not synonymous with the 'general administration'. A well-knit team of motivated, sincere and dedicated officers/staff down below the line under the dynamic leadership of the Vice Chancellor, a known personality in the field of educational administration, initially appointed at least for a plan period and empowered with necessary statutory authorities, will certainly enable

the University to scale new heights and excellence in the field of higher education. In this context, the question of appointment of Vice Chancellors from the well-defined consideration zone deserves special attention. Since human resource is a most crucial resource and the Universities are expected to produce high quality human resource by grinding, polishing and tuning their intake to match the national requirements, creation of a cadre of 'All India Higher Education Service' by the Government of India to man various cadres of universities/institutions of higher education/ learning, our 'Modern Temples', is perhaps the dire need of the hour. The university through its College Development Council may serve as a friend, philosopher and guide to its affiliated and constituent colleges so as to enable them to function effectively and efficiently and experiment with innovations within the given autonomy.

GATS and Higher Education

Higher education, being a tradable commodity under GATS (General Agreement of Trade in Services) has been internationalized. GATS is a comprehensive legal framework of rules and disciplines covering 161 service activities across 12 classified sectors including Education. With advancements in the field of information and communication technology (ICT), traditional boundaries indicating geographical jurisdictions of the universities have broken down and distance and other modes of education have reached almost all corners of the world. International competitiveness in the field of higher education has assumed a significant place and tremendously increased the quest for more and more latest knowledge in the field. In the given situation, it is certainly a tall order for our Indian Universities to cope with the emerging global scenario.

Curriculum Revision

Curriculum for taking care of the fast paced developments in the subject concerned and providing Continuous renewing and updating of the students with an up-to-date knowledge is an essential ingredient of any vibrant university academic system. Incidentally, periodic updating of curriculum has not been found to be a matter of serious concern in the university system. The recent move of UGC to bring out model curriculum was an attempt to take care of the lacunae, defects/shortcomings in the existing curricula and introduce innovative concepts, provide a multi-disciplinary profile and allow a flexible 'cafeteria' like approach to cater for frontiers developments in the field. Faculty and students equipped with latest knowledge in their respective subjects may very well compete at national and international levels. However, it is certain that implementation of revised curricula requires many more hours of home/library/laboratory work on the part of the faculty to tune/equip themselves with the recent/latest developments in the subject and then deliver accordingly.

Multi- disciplinary approach has introduced curiosity/ enthusiasm among faculty and students to learn from other subjects/fields and broaden their horizon and thus equip them with necessary knowledge and skills to deal effectively with the emerging situations. Cross fertilization of ideas in an open and congenial atmosphere is bound to lead to quality in higher education. Serious participation of faculty in national/ international quality improvement programmes and exploring/utilizing such opportunities to the optimum is essential for growth of higher education. There have been many 'successful' and 'not so successful' institutions and

their rich experiences may lead to required innovations/interventions at various levels.

Quality of Research

Quality of research requires serious attention of all concerned. But for reasons best known to everybody, quality of majority of our doctoral/post-doctoral work needs substantial improvement. Building infrastructural capacities of the institutions and teaching and research capabilities of the faculty are the crucial areas for serious consideration and action. Undertaking inter-disciplinary research; publication of quality research papers by the researcher prior to submission of dissertation/thesis; and giving seminars on the topic of the research focusing on methodology, analysis and interpretation of findings be made mandatory. Evaluation of the thesis by a foreign examiner may lead to quality consciousness in research and academic auditing at each stage of research be made an inbuilt component of the system.

Examination Reforms

Examination reform has been a serious issue but not much has been done. Examination reflects the whole education system and, therefore, should not be limited merely to testing of educational achievements/ attainments of a student but should also serve as a reliable tool to assess the effectiveness of instructions and motivation of the students, and inculcating the real value of education in the students. This may be achieved by employing multiple criteria, multiple technique and multiple sources of assessment. All this undoubtedly requires committed teaching work force.

Universities have generally been found lacking in enthusiasm in respect of the implementation of various measures of examination reforms such as entrance test for admission to postgraduate courses, semester system with a minimum number of teaching days, continuous internal evaluation with a certain degree of openness, development of question banks, grading system with equivalence table for marks and grades, revision of syllabi and question papers, and the conduct of examinations in the universities with a view to improving the reliability, validity and objectivity of evaluation and bring about a closer integration of teaching, learning and evaluation. Instances of paper leakage, improper evaluation of examination answer sheets and revaluation scandals are, therefore, hitting the headlines almost every year. Some Universities have taken measures to

arrest the menace of mass copying but with little success. Sincere efforts of all concerned will not only be instrumental in bringing the educational and examination system at par with the global standards and practices but will also instil a sense of confidence among the students and restore the faith of the people at large in our educational system.

Conclusion

Meticulous planning, timely supported with requisite resources in adequate quantity/quality is likely to result into attainment of set goals within the given time frame. However, with the rapid advancements in the domain of knowledge, the heights once attained will only be a benchmark and inspire the system to touch even much higher mark in the years to come. At no stage one may feel contented with the obtained results as the quest for a much higher level of excellence/quality will certainly push all those interested to burn their mid-night oil so that our great nation can keep its head high in the stiff challenging international competitive arena wherein 'knowledge is power'.

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